

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 091100Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7022

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 33414

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS PFOR SREF CB TH

SUBJECT: REFOULEMENT OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES AND RTG REFUGEE POLICY

REF: BANGKOK 32893

SUMMARY: INTERIOR MINISTER SAMAK SUNTHORAWET ANNOUNCED ON DEC 8 FORMATION OF COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE FORCED RETURN OF REFUGEES TO CAMBODIA AND OF ANOTHER TO NEGOTIATE WITH COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA TO ALLOW REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES. HE SUGGESTED THAT RTG WOULD TRY TO SEND BACK NEW REFUGEES AFTER THE END OF THE YEAR, BUT THERE IS SPECULATION IN BANGKOK THAT THIS WAS STATEMENT DESIGNED FOR INTERNAL CONSUMPTION RATHER THAN A SERIOUS PROPOSAL. END SUMMARY.

1. THE INTERIOR MINISTER SAMAK SUNTHORAWET DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE TIME DURING DEC 8 PRESS CONFERENCE TO DISCUSSION OF FORCED REPATRIATION OF 26 REFUGEES TO CAMBODIA NOV 23. FOLLOWING UP PRESS REPORT OF DEC 2 CABINET MEETING (REFTEL), HE ANNOUNCED THAT COMMITTEE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED, WHICH
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HE WILL HEAD, TO INVESTIGATE THE MATTER. HE SAID IT WILL

TRY TO ENTER CAMBODIA THROUGH INTERCESSION OF ICRC AND LIAISON OFFICES TO VERIFY THAT THE REFUGEES WERE NOT EXECUTED. SAMAK NOTED THAT ONE BANGKOK-BASED EMBASSY SENT HIM A LETTER ACCUSING THE RTG OF "DIRTY PLAY" IN THE CASE. HE DECLARED THAT THE DISTRICT OFFICER AT ARANYAPRATHET TOLD HIM WHEN HE VISITED THERE NOV 29 THAT HE BELIEVED THE KC KILLED ALL 26, DESPITE CAMBODIAN CLAIMS TO THE CONTRARY, ADDING THAT PRIME MINISTER THANIN KRAIWICHIAN TOLD CABINET LAST WEEK THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE CAMBODIANS.

2. SAMAK ALSO MADE RATHER CONFUSING COMMENT ON RTG REFUGEE POLICY IN GENERAL. HE NOTED THAT, PREVIOUSLY, UNHCR FUNDS WERE FORTHCOMING ON CONDITION THAT THAILAND DID NOT REPATRIATE REFUGEES AGAINST THEIR WILL. HE SAID THAT PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, DECIDED AS OF AUG 4 NOT TO ACCEPT ANY MORE REFUGEES BUT TO ATTEMPT TO RETURN THE NEW ONES, A DECISION ON WHICH NSC HAS NOW AGREED TO DEFER ACTION UNTIL END OF 1976, WHEN UNHCR AID WILL END (SIC). HE ADDED THAT RTG HAS ALSO ESTABLISHED A COMMITTEE HEADED BY FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT PACHARIYANGKUN TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE THREE COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA TO REPATRIATE ALL THE REFUGEES. IF THIS FAILS, GOVERNMENT WILL REQUEST THIRD COUNTRIES TO TAKE THEM AND, IF UNSUCCESSFUL, WILL HAVE TO ESTABLISH "SELF-HELP SETTLEMENTS" FOR THEM AS LAST RESORT.

3. IT IS UNCERTAIN WHETHER ESTABLISHMENT OF SAMAK'S COMMITTEE IS SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO INVESTIGATE FATE OF THE 26 (WITH WHICH EFFORT CAMBODIANS ARE HARDLY LIKELY TO COOPERATE) OR EFFORT TO DEMONSTRATE MOVEMENT FOR THE MOMENT IN ORDER TO FEND OFF THE HEAT RTG HAS RECEIVED OVER THE REFOULEMENT. ICRC REP WHO READ SAMAK'S COMMENTS ASKED MOI WHAT ROLE HE WAS EXPECTED TO PLAY. HE WAS TOLD THAT SAMAK WAS MISQUOTED AND THAT ICRC ASSISTANCE WAS NOT RPT NOT CURRENTLY NEEDED. THERE IS RUMOR CIRCULATING CONCURRENTLY THAT SIX KC ATTEMPTED TO BECOME REFUGEES AT ARANYAPRATHET NOV 28 BUT WERE TURNED BACK AFTER SEVERAL HOURS ON THAI SOIL. RTG HAS DENIED THE STORY, AND UNHCR INVESTIGATION HAS PROVEN NEGATIVE, BUT ICRC, AMONG OTHERS, IS NOT SO SURE.

4. WHETHER THERE IS CHANGE IN RTG LONG-TERM REFUGEE
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POLICY IS UNCLEAR. SAMAK'S REMARKS WERE CONFUSED, TO SAY THE LEAST. HIS REFERENCE TO AUG 4 DECISION WAS TO ONE TAKEN BY KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT IN 1975, RATHER THAN 1976, FOR EXAMPLE. IT HARDLY SEEMS CONCEIVABLE THAT THAI WOULD FORCE LARGE NUMBER OF REFUGEES WHO HAVE ARRIVED SINCE THAT DATE TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMELANDS. IN ADDITION, UNHCR BELIEVES MOI IN PARTICULAR IS FULLY AWARE THAT AID FOR RTG REFUGEE PROGRAM IS NOT RPT NOT GOING TO TERMINATE WITHIN NEXT FEW WEEKS. A UNHCR OFFICIAL HAS SUGGESTED

THAT THERE MAY BE SOME TOUGHENING UP OF THAI POLICY
TOWARD RECEIVING NEW REFUGEES, WHICH WE AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN
PREDICTING FOR SOME TIME. HE AND OTHER OBSERVERS
BELIEVE SAMAK'S STATEMENT WAS MADE PRIMARILY FOR DOMESTIC
CONSUMPTION AND WAS NOT INTENDED TO SIGNAL DRASTIC CHANGE
IN POLICY, A VIEW WHICH SEEMS QUITE PLAUSIBLE. UNHCR
OFFICIALS INTEND TO REINFORCE THEIR REPRESENTATIONS ON
NON-REFOULEMENT IN CONTACT WITH MOI DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY
DAMRONG SUNTHONSARATHUN DURING TOUR OF REFUGEE CAMPS THIS
WEEKEND.
WHITEHOUSE

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